

# Hey, Mr. Tambourine Man, you win the Nobel Prize in literature

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Bob Dylan performs in Los Angeles, California, January 12, 2012. Dylan was named the winner of the 2016 Nobel Prize in literature October 13, 2016, in a stunning announcement that for the first time bestowed the prestigious award to someone primarily seen as a musician. Photo: AP Photo/Chris Pizzello, File

STOCKHOLM, Sweden — Bob Dylan won the 2016 Nobel Prize in literature Thursday for expanding the poetic possibilities of music. The stunning announcement marked the first time the prestigious award was given to a musician. Dylan's body of work includes the songs "Like a Rolling Stone," "Blowin' in the Wind" and "Mr. Tambourine Man."

Reporters and others who had gathered at the Swedish Academy's headquarters reacted with a loud cheer as the singer-songwriter's name was read out.

Dylan, age 75, is widely regarded as the most influential poet-musician of his generation.

His protest songs such as "Blowin' in the Wind" and "The Times They Are A-Changin'" became anthems for the U.S. anti-war and civil rights movements of the 1960s. His densely poetic and image-rich "Mr. Tambourine Man" helped usher in the folk-rock movement. And his 1965 "Like a Rolling Stone" was named the greatest song of all time by Rolling Stone magazine.

Dylan is the first American winner of the Nobel literature prize since Toni Morrison in 1993.

The academy commended him for "having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition."

## **Singer-Songwriter Has Had Tremendous Impact On Popular Culture**

Dylan's impact on popular culture has been immense. His influence as a lyricist extends to nearly every major music figure and songwriter of the last 50 years, from the Beatles to Bruce Springsteen, Bono, Ed Sheeran and beyond.

Generally described as a rock musician, Dylan has employed numerous musical styles, including country, gospel, blues, folk and pop. He pursued them all, sometimes baffling and even angering his fans.

His songs can be snarling and accusatory ("Idiot Wind,"), dense and hallucinatory ("Desolation Row"), but also tender and melancholy ("Visions of Johanna"). Some are political ("Hurricane," "Only a Pawn in their Game"), while others are puzzling and absurdist ("Stuck Inside of Mobile With the Memphis Blues Again").

Some of his songs are studded with historical, literary or political references (Jack the Ripper, Captain Ahab from Moby Dick, Shakespeare, Paul Revere, T.S. Eliot and Fidel Castro) and laced with sly humor.

"Blowin' in the Wind" captured the hopes of the '60s civil rights movement, yet sounded as if it had been handed down through the oral tradition from another century, with lines like: "How many times must the cannon balls fly before they're forever banned?"

With its rapid-fire rhymes, "Subterranean Homesick Blues" from 1965 is sometimes called one of the first rap songs.

## **Many Experts Had Ruled Him Out**

Dylan had been mentioned in Nobel speculation for years, but many experts had ruled him out. Most thought the academy wouldn't extend its more than a century-old award to the world of music.

They were wrong. The academy's permanent secretary, Sara Danius, said that while Dylan performs his poetry in the form of songs, that's no different from the ancient Greeks, whose works were often performed to music.

"Bob Dylan writes poetry for the ear," she said. "But it's perfectly fine to read his works as poetry."

Danius said that a "great majority" on the 18-member Nobel panel voted for Dylan. She said her personal favorites among Dylan's songs include "Chimes of Freedom" and "Visions of Johanna." People unfamiliar with Dylan's music should start by listening to his 1966 album "Blonde on Blonde," she suggested.

Writers, musicians and even heads of state commented on the Nobel academy's choice on Twitter.

British author Salman Rushdie, whose name is often mentioned in the Nobel literature speculation, called Dylan "the brilliant inheritor of the bardic tradition. Great choice."

## **His Lyrics Are Part Of The Public Lexicon**

Lyrics from dozens of Dylan songs, such as "Blowin' in the Wind," "My Back Pages" and "It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)," have worked their way into the public lexicon over the years. Some have even turned up in legal opinions from judges, as a recent study found.

In a measure of his literary value, "The Norton Introduction to Literature" includes the lyrics to "Mr. Tambourine Man." The textbook is used in many American high schools and universities.

Born on May 24, 1941, in Duluth, Minnesota, Dylan grew up in a Jewish middle-class family.

By his early 20s, he had taken the folk music world by storm. From that time on, he would constantly reinvent himself — often enraging followers, particularly when he started playing electric rock — but would win them back and add new admirers.

He won an Oscar in 2001 for the song "Things Have Changed" and received a lifetime achievement award from the Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences in 1991. In 2008, he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his contributions to music and American culture.

## **A Most Unusual Winner**

Dylan is the most unusual Nobel literature prize winner since 1997, when the award went to Italian playwright Dario Fo. Some say Fo's works also need to be performed to be fully appreciated. By a sad coincidence, Fo died Thursday at 90.

Belarusian writer Svetlana Alexievich won last year's Nobel literature award.

The literature prize completed this year's Nobel Prize announcements. The six awards, each worth 8 million kronor (about \$930,000), will be handed out on Dec. 10, the anniversary of prize founder Alfred Nobel's death in 1896.